



Special Membership Category for 4-H: Kindergarten through Third Graders

It is neither the intent nor the objective of the 4-H Cloverbuds program to duplicate the 4-H member experiences that are designed for older youth, nor to create a “mini-4-H” concept. While the 4-H Cloverbuds program is a part of the overall 4-H Youth Development program and 4-H Cloverbuds members are recognized as 4-H members for the purposes of enrollment, they are considered to be in a special membership category with regard to program and policy.

Chartering 4-H Cloverbuds, 4-H CloverKids or Similar Primary Grade Programs

No matter what a state or county 4-H program chooses to use as the name for members in this age group, the 4-H program must still follow the national policies established for this special membership category and these groups must still be chartered to recognize their program and enable them to use the 4-H Name and Emblem. While different names are recognized for this membership category, “4-H Cloverbuds” will be used within this document for consistency and ease.

Purpose of Kindergarten through Third Grade Programs

The overall purpose of the 4-H Cloverbuds program is to foster the development of life skills that are essential for the cognitive, social, emotional and physical maturation of Kindergarten through 3rd graders. Children in these grades are a distinct audience for 4-H, with unique learning characteristics and developmental needs that are different from older children and youth. As a result, the 4-H Cloverbuds program is designed with specific educational objectives and program policies focused on the 5-8 year old [Note: We recognize that 8 year olds are in transition between the 4-H Cloverbuds program and 4-H, these policies are pertinent to those children served by these special membership programs as defined within a state program].

Participation, safety, personal development, learning and fun are the highest priorities in providing 4-H Cloverbuds programs. The policies outlined in this document seek to ensure that 4-H Cloverbuds members remain safe and have positive, developmentally appropriate experiences in 4-H. State and county programs that offer the 4-H Cloverbuds program are expected to utilize age appropriate programmatic goals, policies, curriculum, and cooperation-based methods to give feedback and recognition. In all programs, the determining factors in designing the learning experiences are the 4-H Cloverbuds members’ interests, abilities, and needs. The focus of the 4-H Cloverbuds is the positive growth of the children, not the activities used as vehicles to foster that growth and development.

POLICIES & GUIDELINES

The 4-H Youth Development program is committed to experiential education, supporting the development of life skills, and meeting developmental needs in positive, productive ways. 4-H accomplishes this through three major mission areas: Science, Engineering & Technology, Healthy Lifestyles, and Citizenship. Based on the needs, interest, and developmental tasks of children in grades K-3, in addition to the 4-H Essential Elements, the following guidelines and policies were established with the initial recognition of the 4-H Cloverbuds program, and subsequently supported by the National 5-8 Curriculum Task Force in 1992. It is understood that policies that affect different age groups and settings will vary and state and county programs may add additional policies and guidelines to direct their programs, however, these policies define the minimum standards for 4-H programming with the K-3 audience.

4-H Cloverbuds programs follow a set of program guidelines based on developmental appropriateness. A “developmentally appropriate” program is one that is based on the general characteristics of an age group and adapts to meet the individual needs of each child. That often involves using different kinds of equipment or providing more adult supervision. Sometimes a 4-H Cloverbuds member will be physically capable of doing something but will not be able to understand the reason for the process or the result. Participation in that activity would be just as inappropriate as participation in an activity that is unsafe because of physical limitations.

As a result, the 4-H Cloverbuds program is fundamentally different than general membership in 4-H. Requirements of the 4-H Cloverbuds program include:

1. Activity-Focused rather than Project-Focused

The educational component of a 4-H Cloverbuds program consists of activities rather than projects. A 4-H Cloverbuds activity focuses on developing a single concept and/or skill rather than focusing on a project over time. It is not appropriate for K-3 graders to participate in an ongoing, planned series of activities as a member, whether it is a 4-H Shooting Sports program, or an animal project. 4-H Cloverbuds members participate in occasional, non-competitive, sampler-type, age-appropriate, properly supervised events or activities sponsored or conducted by 4-H groups.

2. Cooperative vs. Competitive Activities

4-H Cloverbuds programs do not conduct or participate in competitive activities. Competitive activities require motor skills, reflexes, and strength that often are not yet fully developed in young children. In addition, research indicates that participation in competitive activities is developmentally inappropriate for 4-H Cloverbuds members. Grades K-3 children are sensitive to criticism; often have not developed frustration tolerance or the full ability to manage their emotions, which often results in not being able to accept failure well. 4-H Cloverbuds activities should be conducted in a positive environment that focuses on the members’ strengths rather than analyzing their deficiencies. 4-H Cloverbuds members need opportunities to practice skills, discover

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talents and learn about fairness in a non-judgmental environment.

3. 4-H Cloverbuds Members and Exhibition at Fairs

4-H Cloverbuds members are encouraged to *exhibit* activity-related items from their club at appropriate venues. 4-H Exhibitions should be open to participation by 4-H Cloverbuds as noncompetitive exhibitors. 4-H Cloverbuds members are not eligible to receive premium funds as a result of exhibition.

4-H Cloverbuds members should not have animal projects (as described under item #1) nor should they participate as competitive exhibitors with animals. To exhibit animals in a noncompetitive event as a 4-H Cloverbuds member, youth must be in at least 3rd grade during the current 4-H year and there must be increased adult supervision with a one-to-one ratio with the child. This policy is for the safety of the 4-H Cloverbuds member and the public at the public exhibition. The developmental ability and the maturity level of the exhibitor and the unpredictable behavior of animals determine this policy.

4. Adult Supervision of 4-H Cloverbuds Programs

4-H Cloverbuds clubs do not conduct formal business meetings or elect officers. Children in grades K-3 are not yet ready to fulfill the responsibilities of club officership and require much more adult guidance when making group decisions. However, a structured routine is important to this age group.

4-H Cloverbuds clubs handle their finances differently than clubs of older children. For safety reasons, 4-H Cloverbuds should not bring money for dues or supplies to club meetings, nor should they conduct door-to-door fundraising activities. They may, however, participate in group fundraising events supervised by adults. Parents and leaders will decide on how club expenses will be handled when the club is organized.

A minimum of two adult leaders is required to start a 4-H club of any age group and at least two adults (leaders, parents or others) must be present at every 4-H meeting and activity. For groups of 5-6 year olds, the group should not exceed twelve children. For groups of 7-8 years olds, a third adult is required if the group exceeds twelve children and the group size should not exceed sixteen children.

An adult or older teen leader will be with the 4-H Cloverbuds member at all times when in the presence of an animal or when using equipment that is potentially dangerous. This includes: scissors, saws, knives, needles, rockets, kitchen appliances, and so forth. 4-H Cloverbuds members should not operate power driven equipment as a part of activities (sewing machines, power drills, small engines, blenders, mixers, clippers, mowers, etc.). 4-H Cloverbuds members should wear appropriate safety helmets or other safety equipment such as life vests when engaged in activities such as riding horses, bicycles, skateboards, canoeing, or other activities.

Management of K-3 Programs

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Those leading a K-3 special membership category programs should be sensitive to risk management issues, and should consult with insurance providers. Many providers insure “4-H participants” which is defined as 4th graders and up and may not cover K-3 participants in activities or events not specified without an additional rider.

Resources

It is important that children in grades K-3 be involved in activities where the risk of failure is minimized and the opportunity to experience success is maximized. The most reliable way to find activities that are based on the general characteristics of the age group is to select from the many 4-H Cloverbuds resources that are available throughout the 4-H system and referenced on the National 4-H Headquarters website.

New York State 4-H Cloverbuds Leader Handbook:

<http://nys4h-staff.cce.cornell.edu/NYS4-HCloverbudsLeaderHandbook.php>

K-3 Youth in 4-H: Guidelines for Programming, National 5-8 Curriculum Task Force, (1992)

National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA.

Center for 4-H Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension 4-H Cloverbuds Leader Guide.

<https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/TheEssentialElementsof4HYouthDevelopment.pdf>